United Nations E/C.19/2003/18

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 March 2003

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
New York, 12-23 May 2003
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Mandated areas

Information received from the United Nations system

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

I. Background and general context

1. Since 1945, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has worked to alleviate poverty and hunger by:

- Promoting agricultural development.
- Improved nutrition.
- The pursuit of food security.

2. Rural populations and vulnerable groups are the target people for FAO work, and indigenous peoples are among the most vulnerable groups in the world in terms of food and livelihood security.

3. FAO works with indigenous peoples and their organizations in many of its regular programme activities. Indigenous issues are an integral part of the work of numerous organizational units, including those working in household food security and nutrition, fisheries, forestry, land, water, plant production, management and protection, livestock, agricultural support systems, legal advice (on normative frameworks for access to and use of natural resources), and units dealing with participation, rural institutions and land tenure.

4. The programmes and activities involving indigenous peoples (including traditional communities) include:

- Indigenous land husbandry.

* E/C.19/2003/1.
** Submitted late to allow for comprehensive input from indigenous focal points within FAO.

03-30993 (E) 250403

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Biodiversity, including global programmes on plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- Farmer field schools.
- Farmers' rights.
- Nutrition and household food security.
- Food insecurity and vulnerability profiling and mapping.
- Sustainable forest management.
- Development law.
- Land tenure.
- Rural institutions and participation.
- Gender, population and indigenous knowledge.
- Research, extension and training.
- Measurement tools on sustainable agriculture and rural development practices in the interest of indigenous peoples.

II. Current activities contributing to the PFII's recommendations and priorities

A. Some FAO programmes and activities involving indigenous peoples

1. Standard-setting: development of international treaties and codes of conduct

5. Under the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, several treaties have been negotiated and adopted involving indigenous communities and groups, including:

- International Treaty on Plant Genetic resources for Food and Agriculture, specifically regarding Farmers' rights, including indigenous peoples.
- International Code of Conduct for Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer, including traditional indigenous plants.

2. Technical cooperation and special projects

6. The globally important indigenous agricultural heritage systems project is an FAO/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Global Environment Facility (GEF) multi-stakeholder and multi-agency and donor initiative. Its objective is to establish the basis for the global recognition, dynamic conservation and sustainable management of outstanding agricultural heritage systems and landscapes, their biodiversity, knowledge systems and cultural heritage. It is implemented through participatory action programmes in 10 pilot agricultural heritage systems over a period of seven to nine years, with capacity-building of communities; mitigation of threats to the functioning of agricultural systems; enhancement and sharing of systems benefits and the creation of legal and policy environments supportive of the sustainable functioning and viability of the project.

7. A programme on the measurement of tools for sustainable agriculture and rural development practices in the interests of indigenous peoples is a joint project with the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC). It aims to develop a set of "cultural indicators" or tools for measuring the suitability and appropriateness of agriculture and rural development activities and approaches in the best interests of indigenous peoples. The implementation of the programme involves, among others:

- Carrying out a stakeholder consultation on the concerning topic.
- Developing a set of cultural indicators or tools as described above.

8. A methodology and procedures for documenting traditional food systems of indigenous peoples has been developed in collaboration with the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment of McGill University, Canada. Other activities supported and/or implemented by the Economic and Social Department include:

- A methodological guide for vulnerable livelihoods profiling, incorporating issues indigenous populations.
- Special vulnerable groups profiles in mountain areas of Viet Nam and Guatemala, largely inhabited by indigenous groups. Similar profiles on Nepal and Ethiopia are being prepared.
- Development and promotion of a simple methodology for enhancing the relevance of nutrition and household food security programmes to the issues of concern to indigenous people through a participatory appraisal and planning process at the community and district levels.
- The programme strategy is centred on enhancing the involvement of indigenous peoples in decentralized planning and decision-making, strengthening their resource base and social networks for greater self-reliance and determination. The programme's food security strategy emphasizes the role of indigenous crops and foods for the improvement of nutrition among poor and marginal groups.

9. The gender, biodiversity and local knowledge systems to strengthen agriculture and rural development in southern Africa (LinKS) project does not specifically target indigenous people but focuses on local and indigenous knowledge systems and its important role for sustainable agro-biodiversity management and food security. LinKS is a regional project being implemented in the United Republic of Tanzania, Mozambique and Swaziland. The LinKS project works to improve rural people's food security and promote the sustainable management of agro-biodiversity by strengthening the capacity of institutions to use participatory approaches that recognize men and women farmer's knowledge in their programme and policies. The LinKS project has three main activity areas:

- Training and capacity-building of field-level staff about the value of local and indigenous knowledge systems and how to use gender analysis and participatory methods for both research and action processes.
- Research on gender-based differences in farmers' knowledge and management of animal and plant genetic resources for farming.
- Communication and advocacy to enhance sharing and exchange of information about the value of local and indigenous knowledge for sustainable agro-biodiversity management and food security.

B. Participation of indigenous peoples in FAO meetings

10. Indigenous peoples' organizations participate in:

- The preparations and undertaking of the five-year review of the World Food Summit through its International Non-Governmental Organization/Civil Society Organization Planning Committee.
- The work of the Commission on Sustainable Development on the implementation of Agenda 21 through participation in multi-stakeholder dialogues on sustainable agriculture and rural development. Indigenous peoples have been present at formal multi-stakeholder dialogues on that topic through the Commission and World Summit on Sustainable Development processes. They also participate regularly in meetings, telephone conferences and electronic discussions on sustainable agriculture and rural development and have been involved in the evolution of a civil society-led initiative on that topic.
- Indigenous peoples international networks participate as observers in relevant sessions of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The Commission invites as observers to all its meetings international non-governmental organizations that develop work in the arena of the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources, many of which are indigenous communities groups or work in close interaction with them.

11. Indigenous peoples' input into the sustainable agriculture and rural development dialogue process is facilitated by the International Indian Treaty Council, one of approximately 40 indigenous peoples organizations and networks in the indigenous peoples major group caucus of the Commission on Sustainable Development. IITC facilitated the direct participation of indigenous peoples from the South, Central and North America, Asia and Africa in the multi-stakeholder dialogues at the eighth session of the Commission. The sustainable agriculture and rural development initiative has also been working with the Tebtebba Foundation, an indigenous peoples' international centre for policy research and education, on a less frequent basis. Tebtebba has been taking the lead on developing terms of engagement for the initiative that will provide a framework for the joint work of the diverse stakeholders involved in the initiative.

12. One way in which indigenous peoples movements and/or representatives are raising their issues and priorities and increasing interaction with FAO is through the mechanism of the International Non-Governmental Organizations/Civil Society Organization Planning Committee for the five-year review of the World Food Summit. The Committee is a facilitating mechanism for interface between NGOs/civil society organizations/social movements and FAO on the range of issues that emerged from the NGO/civil society organization forum held in parallel to the Summit and its five-year review. The Committee is based on the principles of self-organization and total autonomy of civil society. It is a network of some of the major NGO/civil society organization global, regional, thematic and constituency networks, such as farmers, indigenous peoples, artisanal fisherfolk and agricultural workers, with which FAO cooperates on an ongoing basis. A focal point for indigenous peoples' organizations is a member of the Committee and each region is expected to include an indigenous peoples' network among the regional focal points.

13. On a more informal basis, FAO has contacts with many indigenous organizations and individuals in the context of, among others, its work on land tenure, the globally important indigenous agricultural heritage systems project and the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Recently, contacts have been strengthened with the Rigoberta Menchu Tum Foundation.

C. Information

1. Focal points network on indigenous issues

14. FAO has established a focal point network to deal with indigenous issues. The Director-General nominated a focal point for indigenous issues in 2001 in response to the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The network involves one focal point member designated by each FAO technical department and one focal point designated by each FAO regional office. The network serves as an internal forum for information exchange and support of indigenous issues in FAO activities. It is the focal point for inter-agency collaboration and information exchange.

2. Land tenure

15. Articles on ancestral domains claims and land rights are some of the issues on indigenous peoples that the *Land Reform, Land Settlement and Cooperatives Bulletin* includes in its twice-yearly publication.

III. Relation of FAO activities to issues and recommendations emphasized at the first session of the Forum requiring action from United Nations entities

16. As explained in sections I and II above, FAO is addressing many of the issues raised at the first session of the Forum within its general activities aimed at improving living conditions, food security and access to natural resources of the poor and vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples.